



Report for:	Finance and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
Date of meeting:	8th September 2020
Part:	1
If Part II, reason:	

Title of report:	Allotment Service Update.
Contact:	Graeme Elliot, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources. Author/Responsible Officers: Nigel Howcutt (Assistant Director Finance and Resources) Richard Rice (General Manager Commercial Assets and Property Development)
Purpose of report:	1. To provide members with an outline of the Allotment service provided to DBC residents.
Recommendations	1. To note the content of the report.
Review	To be reviewed annually as part of the budget setting process.
Corporate Objectives:	A clean safe and enjoyable environment. Building Strong and Vibrant Communities.
Implications:	<u>Financial</u> The Allotment Service has an annual Revenue budget of £10k p.a. to cover ongoing maintenance and upkeep. In addition to this the 20/21 budget setting process, approved an ongoing £40k p.a. capital budget for the next 3 years, to further improve and invest in the allotments.
'Value for money' implications	<u>Value for money</u> The service as a whole is a net cost to the council, but the benefits the service provides to residents is in line with the corporate plan objectives. The allotment service provides an opportunity for residents to get involved in interacting with the

	<p>green space in the borough and also it assists in building stronger communities.</p> <p>The service is one that the council see as a real investment in both local communities and the local ecological environment.</p>
Risk implications	N/A
Community Impact Assessment	No changes to service provision so existing Community Impact Assessment still relevant.
Health and safety Implications	N/A
Consultees:	<p>Graeme Elliot Portfolio Holder Finance and Resources.</p> <p>Richard Rice (GM Commercial Assets and Property Development)</p> <p>Adriana Livingstone (Team Leader Valuation and Estates)</p> <p>Chris Price (Outdoor Recreation Officer)</p>
Background papers:	N/A
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	GM – General Manager

Introduction/Background:

The Finance and Resources Scrutiny Committee in February requested a report in to the operation and utilisation of the allotment service.

DBC operates 500 allotment plots over 16 different locations and charges £30 a year per standard plot, see Appendix A for the details of the allotment sites.

To apply for an allotment residents need to go to the website input their details and they are added to the waiting list. The waiting list is a live document that is monitored and reviewed on an ongoing basis, and includes residents site preferences. The present waiting list contains over 300 residents, prior to the pandemic it was at 283.

Key Service Performance and Strategy.

The allotment service re lets about 150 allotments per year on average (30%) of the total plots available.

Demand for allotments in the last 4 or 5 years has increased and the concept of renting an allotment is one that is now very high in public perception, and this brings both positive and negative outcomes.

The desire to have an allotment is not always supported with a good understanding and ability to maintain and manage an allotment. As a result in the last 2 years, on

average circa 30% of new/first time allotment tenants are unsuccessful within the first year, with allotments being either returned or taken back by the council.

This creates additional work in the volume of re lets required and also in the majority of cases requires investment to get the plots back up to a lettable standard.

The positive is that the increased demand has meant that the council now has a significant waiting list of residents so that plots can be re let quickly.

At present the occupancy of the allotments is at 91% with only 43 vacant plots. The 43 vacant plots are made up of 36 plots that are under maintenance prior to being re let and 7 plots that are currently under offer to residents on the waiting list, see appendix A for the details of these sites. If the present plots under offer are accepted that would deliver an occupancy rate of 93%.

Allotment Plot Lettings and Management.

There is a lease agreement that new tenants agree to when they take on a new allotment. The lease includes terms and conditions that DBC manages on an ongoing basis.

The Outdoor recreation officer regularly inspects the sites and will also discuss issues with volunteer wardens, where they exist. If issues are raised over upkeep, security or unworked plots the officer will communicate with the tenants and take the required action. The action taken would vary dependent on the circumstances and outcome of that communication but could include a series of warning letters, and potentially end with a Notice to Quit (NTQ) being issued.

Maintenance Programme.

The service has an ongoing maintenance programme in 20/21 that is split into 2 separate work streams.

Work stream 1: Ongoing Maintenance.

Standard ongoing maintenance projects on a small number of allotments that are returned/taken back by DBC in an overgrown state. This work is undertaken as and when required.

Work stream 2: Major works.

This is aimed at tackling the more extensive works on plots that have been untenable for a period of time and require enhanced works. This is a new programme that will be initiated in 2020/21, and is funded through the NEW additional approved £40k capital investment.

These funds are initially targeting 3 main projects in 20/21, although due to the pandemic all these works have had to be scheduled for the latter half of the year that makes delivery more of a challenge;

Project 1 Windmill Rd: The site is heavily overgrown and unused in entirety. The site has a couple of secondary issues to the overgrown nature of the vegetation in that the access to the site is limited and the site is suffering from low level fly tipping.

Planning is underway at present and work will be underway on this site in the Autumn of 2020 with a plan to have the site completed by the spring of 2021 and the start of the new growing season. The council is working in partnership with local

residents to provide an allotment that best meets the needs of the local residents, as to date there has been little demand for these allotment plots.

Project 2 Chambersbury Lane: Around 6 overgrown plots require maintenance and the access and boundary fences of the site require further maintenance.

Project 3 Adeyfield Rd: Around 8 overgrown plots require maintenance and the access and boundary fences of the site require further maintenance.

Recommendations:

To note this report and promote the allotment service to your residents.

The proposed work that is to be undertaken at Windmill Rd is to increase the quality and appearance of the site, to try and resolve the historical difficulty in regards to demand for this site.